Abstract

Eve's Four Faces consists of a series of digitally animated and interactive surfaces. Their content and structure are derived from a collection of sources outside the conventional boundaries of architectural research, namely psychology and the broader spectrum of arts and culture.

The investigation stems from a psychological study documenting the attributes and social relationships of four distinct personality prototypes: the Individuated, the Traditional, the Conflicted, and the Assured (York and John 1992). For the purposes of this investigation, all four prototypes are assumed to be inherent, to certain degrees, in each individual. However, the propensity towards one of the prototypes forms the basis for each individual’s “personality structure.” The attributes, social implications and prospects for habitation have been translated into animations and surfaces operating within A House for Eve's Four Faces. The presentation illustrates the potential for constructed surfaces to be configured and transformed interactively, responding to the needs and qualities associated with each prototype. The intention is to study the effects of each configuration and how each configuration may be therapeutic in supporting, challenging or altering one's personality as it oscillates and shifts through the four prototypical conditions.

Constructed Surfaces: the digital consequence

It suffices for a short time to follow the trace, the repeated course of words, in order to perceive, in a sort of vision, the labyrinthine constitution of being.

Georges Bataille

This investigation emphasizes the architectural surface as a means of communication and explores its potential as a complex medium of expression. In contrast to the typical definition of the surface as superficial and/or merely two-dimensional, this project critically redefines the conventional notions of surface and adds to the contemporary desire to express its extraordinary depth and meaning.

In a review of an exhibition entitled Sign as Surface, curator Peter Zellner describes the “communicative significance” of the architectural surface:

"Through the architectural surface, these exhibitions draw our attention, once again, to the function of meaning in architecture, to architecture's ability, and perhaps its responsibility, to communicate responsively to contemporary culture. The architectural surface is intimately
connected with meaning; simply, we read surfaces, we scan them for content” (Barker 2003).

The evolution of digital media has enabled the architectural surface to appropriate multiple sources of information and reveals its communicative power. From simple “gestural” formulations to more complex and “generative” models enhanced by the capacity of digital technologies, I refer to the constructed surface as the embodiment of these newly developing strategies and their capacity to influence the ways we think about and experience architecture. The constructed surface is a visual field of information able to be experienced through its abstract and physical forms. I analyze and articulate its ability to express identity; aesthetic qualities; technological innovations; and ultimately, its impact on human experience and behavior. These newly derived conceptions of architectural surfaces elevate their significance as a reflection of cultural values and extend their use and pertinence in everyday habitation.

A House for Eve’s Four Faces: animations and surface configurations

In an article entitled The Four Faces of Eve, Kate York and Oliver John define the process of individuation, “Psychic conflict over separation from parents and conventional norms form the core from which all types of individuals emerge, but their differing resolution of this problem shapes their future paths” (York and John 1992). They continue by documenting the results of varying degrees of individuation in their study of four personality prototypes: the “Individuated,” the “Traditional,” the “Conflicted,” and the “Assured.” Table 1 lists the attributes of each prototype. For this investigation, all four prototypes are assumed to be inherent, to certain degrees, in each individual. But the propensity toward one of the prototypes forms the basis for each individual’s personality structure and hence, the content and structure of the constructed surface.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individuated</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Conflicted</th>
<th>Assured</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Ego Resiliency</td>
<td>Moderate Ego Resiliency</td>
<td>Low Ego Resiliency</td>
<td>High Ego Resiliency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
<td>Emotional Instability</td>
<td>Emotional Stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Disagreeable</td>
<td>Masculine Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadly Intellectual</td>
<td>Feminine Behavior</td>
<td>Interpersonal Conflict</td>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>Protective of Others</td>
<td>Social Avoidance</td>
<td>Low Anxiety/Doubt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introspective Interests</td>
<td>Feelings of Guilt</td>
<td>Worry</td>
<td>Perceived as Cold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>Self-Denying</td>
<td>Anxious</td>
<td>Socially Distant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Aspirations</td>
<td>Giving</td>
<td>Insecure</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warmth/Respect for Others</td>
<td>Organized</td>
<td>Defensive</td>
<td>Capable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Prototype attributes (York and John 1992).
The Architectural Surface: as behavioral mediator

The constructed surfaces devised for A House for Eve’s Four Faces are influenced by information as well as embedded with information. The surfaces are translations of information from sources outside of architecture and serve as mediators between the psychic and physical realms. Two modes of investigation proffer architectural surfaces that have the capacity to communicate in multiple ways, including graphic imagery, materiality, tectonic form, functionality and spatial juxtaposition. They are a means of connecting the opportunity for self-expression to the architectural expression of a habitable space.

First, I explore how the surface of the digital animation may be constructed in order to express the personality characteristics, desires and sensibilities of the user. The digital adaptations incorporate references from the fine arts and popular culture. They represent and juxtapose the overall affect of each personality prototype superimposing text and image. They are used as a means of describing the attributes inherent in each personality prototype and their possible variations in built form. The digital environment is designed to prompt the individual to reflect upon and respond to the dynamic conditions of the surface.

Second, I consider the engagement of the architectural surface at the human scale. The surfaces are integrated with interactive technologies and communicate by adapting to the surrounding environment and its inhabitants. The surfaces and spatial conditions are configured interactively as the house transforms, responding to the needs and qualities associated with each prototype. The intention is to study the therapeutic effects of each configuration. By therapeutic, “working to restore or maintain somebody’s health,” (Encarta Dictionary 2006) I mean the opportunity for an individual, faced with a propensity towards a certain personality prototype, to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of its characteristics and make changes towards the improvement or enhancement of one’s life. Here, the digital surface and its interactive potential are intended to connect the individual to his/her own sensibilities and consider their integration and distinctiveness in creative, private and social situations.

Four Prototypical Surface Configurations

In this section, York and John’s descriptions of each prototype are given as the basis for the resultant approach to devising four prototypical surface configurations. Depending on the prototype being served, the hierarchy of surfaces changes, giving preference to the one prototype while using the others as secondary systems of support.

A set of interactive sliders illustrates the varying relationships of the surfaces depending on the level of guidance needed or interactivity desired by the occupant. Low levels result in little or no intervention or reconfiguration where high levels result in greater intervention and reconfiguration.
**Individuated – tapestry as surface**

“The creative (or Individuated) group consists of those who transcend the conflict (of individuation) by developing a goal-seeking orientation. They direct their inner tension to creative expression and thus manage to overcome pressures for conformity and affirm their separateness as individuals.” “Overall, the personality profile represented by our first prototype portrays a woman with her own identity” (York and John 1992).

The surface configuration of the Individuated personality preferences the garden and studio as places for creativity (Figure 1). These spaces have unobstructed views and are flexible in their orientation and configuration. They are supported by a substructure of operative, storage and communications systems. The terrain of the garden and the tableaux of the studio represent the surfaces of ultimate possibility—where creativity is encouraged and freely expressed.

**Traditional – index as surface**

“Individuals in the Traditional type avoid confronting this conflict (of individuation) by accepting the will of their parents and the norms of society. They are spared the pains of individuation by imposing limits on their own development.” “The attributes of the second prototype form a profile reminiscent of the caring, dutiful wife and mother” (York and John 1992).

The surface configuration of the Traditional personality is comprised of a series of locks (Figure 2). Each lock represents the operative or elementary functions of the house, such as security, sustenance and cleansing. They control access into and within the house, interlocking as one either resists or conforms to a predetermined schedule of activities. The surfaces of the locks embody the rituals and mechanisms necessary for everyday life.

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*Figure 1. Individuated Animation Still.*

*Figure 2. Traditional Animation Still.*
**Conflicted – archive as surface**

“The conflicted individuals experience inner division, being aware both of their own will and parental and societal norms, but they do not achieve a resolution and remain caught between dependency and rebellion.” “The third prototype represents a generally unfavorable personality constellation. These attributes suggest both intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict and an unrealistic view of the self” (York and John 1992).

The surface configuration of the Conflicted personality is organized with the use of storage, archiving and memory devices (Figure 3). They alternately fracture and stitch a multitude of spatial relationships. The devices are generated by an ever-changing set of surfaces that support the acting out of life’s unresolved scenarios. Ambiguity and resolution are allowed to alternate in a constant state of flux.

**Assured – motherboard as surface**

“The assured person shows an apparent lack of inner conflict or tension and a focus on the concrete, manageable aspects of life.” “This pattern of attributes is also similar to Rank’s (1945) description of the adapted person as someone who feels no conflict over conforming with social norms and conventions. The present analysis adds to this portrait assertiveness and lack of anxiety” (York and John 1992).

The surface configuration of the Assured personality implements systems of communication, both virtual and mechanical (Figure 4). The systems connect the functions within the house as well as to the outside world. The surfaces function as avatars and are by nature unemotional and indifferent to subject or outcome.

**Summary**

I am seeking to interpret the value of the constructed architectural surface as a behavioral mediator. The investigations reveal a phenomenal depth, communicated through visuality and tectonics. As well, they expose the literal or habitable depth of the surface, speculating on its functional and spatial distinctions. The challenge is to generate architectural surfaces that reveal
a technological capacity while enhancing our experience and sensitivity within a media driven society. Each exploration attempts to communicate visual, tactile and/or mutable information. This line of inquiry reveals and reinvigorates the contemporary sensitivity and value for the architectural surface in both its digital and built forms.

The focus of this inquiry stems from my interest in the intuitive nature of personal expression and its transformation into the phenomenal aspects of architecture. This work is a testing ground for the translation of abstract ideas into a meaningful architectural language. I have emphasized the fundamentals of digital and graphic communication and how it influences and enhances the communicative value of the architectural surface. The results of these activities reflect the continual development of technological innovations; affect and engage our living environments; reference the characteristics and sensibilities of the individual; and ultimately, reinforce our desire for beauty in composition, materiality and form.

This work is aligned with more current adaptations, which consider the surface as an interactive and socially conscious device. Here, its cultural manifestations are articulated by its digital and structural detailing, creating a tectonic sensuality. There is a quest to merge the boundaries between art and technology where the identity of the surface may be experienced through the integration or fluid exchange of information, meaning and graphic expression.

References


Images

Animation Stills by Barbara Ambach © 2005-6